

Possibly the Earliest Publication From the Cortesianus Codex

by Randa Marhenke (February 15, 2010)

Some years ago, I happened upon an article¹ published in 1873 by J. M. Melgar y Serrano (known for his descriptions of a monolithic Olmec colossal head²), which purported to translate a Maya manuscript belonging to Señor Miró. Upon investigating further, I found that this manuscript was what we call the Cortesianus Codex, a part of the Madrid Codex. This article showed, somewhat poorly, an engraving of a drawing of what we now refer to as page 16 of the Madrid Codex. The “translation” was a bit fanciful, and in an effort to prove ancient communications between the Old and New World, had references to the Gulf Stream, volcanoes, fire, islands, lava, seas, earthquakes, and what-not. Nevertheless, Melgar y Serrano did give the reference for the basis of his drawing: *La Ilustración de Madrid*, Núm. 29 (March 15, 1871).

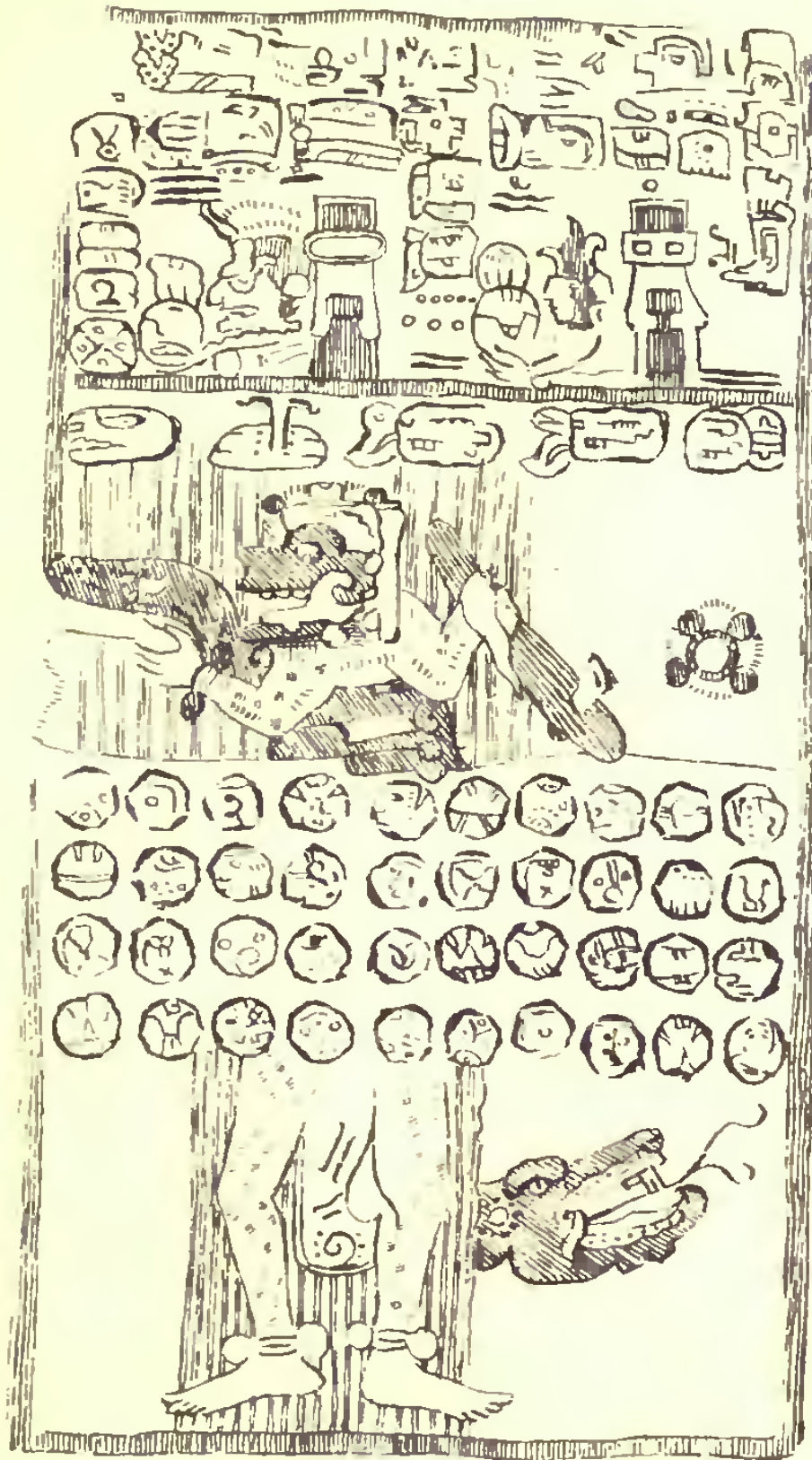
It turns out that beautiful digital copies of early *Números* of *La Ilustración de Madrid*, specifically *Números* 1-58, are now on the web³. They were scanned under the auspices of the Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica, of the Ministerio de Cultura, in 2006. Herein, in *Número* 29, p. 77 of *La Ilustración de Madrid*, page 16 of the Madrid Codex had actually been drawn and engraved with quite a bit more accuracy than Melgar's copy would indicate, and I feel merits some praise. The artist, according to the “Índice” (at the end of *La Ilustración de Madrid*, Núm. 58) was D. J. L. Pellicer, who did other engravings for other early issues of *La Ilustración de Madrid*, too. The text (placed on p. 80 of *La Ilustración de Madrid*, *Número* 29) that went with the drawing was, according to Paz Cabello Carro of the Museo de America⁴, written by Basilio Sebastián Castellanos de Losada, though he appears not to have been given credit for doing so in the afore-mentioned “Índice”. Castellanos in the text explained that *La Ilustración de Madrid* had gotten special permission from D. José Ignacio Miró, the then owner of this codex, to allow this reproduction. By 1875, Sr. Miró had sold this codex to the Museo Arqueológico de Madrid, and it is now housed in the Museo de América (Madrid).⁵

As far as I know, this is the earliest published rendition of any part of the Cortesianus Codex.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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From Melgar y Serrano, J. M., 1873:



CÓDICE AMERICANO DEL SEÑOR MIRÓ.

From LA ILUSTRACION DE MADRID, March 15, 1871:



CÓDICE AMERICANO DEL SEÑOR MIRÓ.